

Stalin's Terror

"[Josef Stalin] gives the impression of a large and crude claylike figure, a golem, into which a demonic spark has been instilled. [He was nonetheless] a man who perhaps more than any other determined the course of the twentieth century." – Robert Conquest

Introduction

Although Stalin would have preferred to have been remembered for his towering economic achievements, he is most closely associated with The Purges. Through a combination of terror and show trials, he succeeded in wiping out millions of his fellow communists and countrymen in the years leading up to World War Two.

By 1940 Stalin had arrested and executed almost every important living **Bolshevik** from the Revolution. Of 1,966 delegates to the party congress in 1934, 1,108 were arrested. Of the 139 Central Committee members of 1934, over 90 were shot. Five of the 11 found in the Politburo of 1934 were killed, many in mysterious circumstances.

Even members of the **secret police** were charged with treason. In 1936, **Yagoda**, the Head of the NKVD, was removed from post and shot. **Yezhov**, his successor, known as the "poison dwarf" only lasted two years before he too was killed. Lower ranking NKVD men were accused of not rounding up enough traitors, and they too were shot.

The **Yezhovshchina** ("era of Yezhov," named for NKVD chief Nikolay Yezhov) ravaged the **military** as well, leading to the execution or incarceration of about half the officer corps. Three out of five Soviet marshals and one-third of the Red Army officers were arrested or shot. Outside of politics, many millions of others died in the purges.

Ordinary people too were "purged". It is suggested that between 1934 and 1939 as many as 12 million people may have died either from execution or in the labour camps. A further 12 million were still alive in labour camps in 1939.

The key defendant, Leon **Trotsky**, was living in exile abroad, but he still did not survive Stalin's desire to have him dead and was assassinated by a Soviet agent in 1940.

Stalinist history



Stalin with Nikolai Yezhov.



Stalin with Yezhov removed.



Lenin and Trotsky celebrate the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution in Red Square.







Lenin Celebrates, but Trotsky has been airbrushed out.

STALIN'S SECRET POLICE

As he gained power, Stalin made widespread use of the secret police for his personal reasons. Previously it had been employed to seek out and dispose of enemies of the Soviet Union. By late 1927 it was becoming an extension of Stalin's political power.

Find out some key details about the careers of each of the following four key figures, perhaps using the excellent www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk. The more gruesome the details you can find, the better!

DATE	SECRET POLICE	LEADER	
1918	CHEKA OGPU	Dzerzhinsky (to 1926) 	
1920			
1922			
1924			
1926	NKVD	Yagoda (to 1936) 	
1928			
1930			
1932			
1934		Yezhov (to 1938) 	
1936			
1938			
1940		Beria (to 1953) 	

OVERVIEW: THE TERROR AND THE PURGES

Fill in this table with details from whatever sources you have. Focus particularly on what the accusations against these people were, how they were treated, and what the results were.

THE TERROR	
1928: Industrial figures Shakhty Trial	
1934: Political figures (general) Riutin and Kirov	

THE PURGES / SHOW TRIALS	
1936: Political figures (left-wing) Kamenev, Zinoviev	
1937: Industrial figures Pyatakov, Radek, Sokolnikov	
1938: Army figures Tukhachevsky	
1938: Political figures (right-wing) Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda [Tomsky suicide]	
1940: Trotsky assassination	